

Halo: Remnants, or Reclamation?

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Summary: With the war over, HIGHCOM sees fit to reopen the Scoutship Initiative. Powered by redesigned slipspace engines, their crews are tasked with finding and studying new worlds for humanity to claim. But one crew finds a planet already occupied: a remote colony, that by all odds, shouldn't be there. Still, that's not saying much when it was founded by a man with an impossible life.

## 1. Prologue: Recruitment

\*\*Prologue: Recruitment\*\*

\* \* \*

><p>"Come on, don't tell us you're going to chicken out now."</p>

I took a breath to steady my nerves as I eyed the tip of the injector unit hovering over my arm. A small vial sat in the loading port.

"No, no, I'm not." I replied. "I just can't get over how green this stuff is. Iâ€¦ I need a moment."

"Seriously? You're about to undergo a life-changing process and you're worried about the activation solution being GREEN?" She shot back.

Another voice spoke up. "Give it a rest: of course he's going to be a little bit nervous. You're second gen, right? Didn't your parents ever tell you how nervous they were?"

It didn't matter who was talking at this point: I was too focused on that injector, holding a great opportunity, but also a heavy burden. My friend continued speaking. "You could walk away right now. No one would stop you, you're free to choose your own way."

"Oh please, since when did you get so philosophical?" I said, rolling

my eyes. "Next thing I know you're going to start asking things like 'Why are we here?' or something like that. Oh, and I just did choose my own way."

A small mark on my arm showed where I had brought the injector down. A cold tingling had started spreading from the injection site. It was an oddly comforting sensation, especially given what it was supposed to turn into.

"Oh great. Finally. Well, better get the doc back in here, you're going to need some serious painkillers pretty soon."

"How do you feel right now, anyway?" With the tension of the moment gone, I could tell it was my buddy Greg talking.

"Oh, I'm alright for now. Though I can imagine the worst part must beâ€¢" A Molotov crashing through the window? "Son of bitch, wasn't this supposed to be a green zone?!" I shouted.

Wasting no time, Greg had already cleared a path through the resulting blaze with the fire extinguisher that had been tucked in the corner. "Jessica! Get the doc, we've gotta get out of here!"

"No shit, muscle head!" She shot back: "I've got the painkillers; goodness knows we all might need them now." The characteristic three-round bursts of BR-55's had started cracking through the air. Damn, I'd only been in the clinic for about thirty minutes, and the small protest outside had managed to explode into a full-blown riot. In the back of my head I half-prayed to whatever deity out there what those BR-55's were in the hands of security forces and loaded with lockdown paint.

"Well, I'll take a couple of those, then. Where's the doc so that I can call him in the morning?" I remarked as I took the pills from Jessica's hand.

"Right here, and carrying an entirely different kind of prescription. Let's just say that the immune system in the area has been compromised." I opened my mouth in shock as the doctor in question walked back from a storage closet carrying four riot shields and a box with the Na'Haru Armory logo stamped across it, along with the designation M6-P.

"Where the hell did you even get all that? And what do you mean by 'The immune system has been compromised?', huh?" I asked.

"I mean that looking out the window tells me that about half the Enforcers in the area are on Supremacist payroll. You've got about fifteen minutes before they'll see you as a target: get to a subway station or something, and get out of here. You and your friends should take these as well:" He handed out the M6-P handguns, a hybrid weapon that used ferromagnetic bullets to hold a coating of plasma in place, hence the P designation added to M6. "No one out there is going to hesitate when shooting at them. If the time comes to defend yourselves, don't think. Just act." He sighed, and continued: "I had a bad feeling this would happen someday. Guess it's always good to be prepared."

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><p>"And so that's how it happened. My parent's weren't too pleased about the change, but after hearing about the extent of the Supremacist's burn operation that day, they were happier that I was alive and well."<p>

"I seeâ€œ! And you say that this is part of the motivation behind joining the Freelancing wing?"

"Not directly, but yes."

"Very well then, we'll consider your application in detail, and inform you of the results in a few weeks." The administrator across the table from me nodded, then stood up as he offered his hand for a parting handshake. Grasping his hand firmly in my paw as I stood up, I offered a small smile as I made my last remarks: "Alright then. Thank you for this opportunity, and I sure hope I didn't disappoint."

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><p>Meanwhile, some thirteen thousand light-years away, a physicist by the name of Jonathan Graves was on the borderline of having his mind blown over the phone.<p>

"The Scoutship Initiative? Wasn't that shut down decades before the contact at Harvest in favor of automated probes?"

He frowned as the person on the other end of the line elaborated.

"Yes, but I was just one guy on the whole team working on the new drives. Why me?"

Another pause as the HIGHCOM official explained who was asking me to take the position, along with everything from the responsibilities to the paycheck. And the extra guest who would be coming along for the ride.

"Very well then. 2:00 on Monday. I'll have the calendar marked, sir. And I have to say, after the initial shock of the call, I really am quite honored that you think I'm up for the task."

And with that, Jonathan hung up, slumping back in his seat as he speculated on the journey to come. It was one thing to collaborate by with Sangheili engineers on a new slipspace drive, but living with a warrior-turned-diplomat on the same ship? It would probably be quite the experience.

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><p>AN: 13,000 light years may seem excessive, but going on the average covenant slipspace speed (912 /day) further improved on my UNSC ingenuity, it's really not too far.

## 2. Chapter 1: Preflight Problems

\*\*Chapter 1: Preflight Problems\*\*

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><p>Jonathan sighed in exasperation: it seemed as though airports, and now today's spaceports, never had their act together. Not five hundred years ago, not now.</p>

"What do you mean, I don't have clearance? Isn't this supposed to be a civilian dock?"

The security officer only offered a facsimile of a smile as he replied: "It's not when there's a hinge-head stomping around. Only select individuals are allowed through: they're trying to keep arrangements hush-hush."

That was it. If there was one thing that annoyed Jonathan more than an idiot, it was a pretentious idiot. "Look buddy, if they're trying to keep things 'hush-hush', they wouldn't have a big-mouth like you watching this entrance. Not stop trying to be important, pull up the goddamn flight roster, and let me through, you bigoted asshole!"

Smirking at Jonathan's anger, the guard put his feet up on his desk and leaned back complacently. "Make me."

Suddenly, the door to the docking area slid open, and a scowling woman walked out. Taking advantage of the guard's unstable position, she dumped him to the floor unceremoniously. "You left ya' intercom on, bloody piker. Now piss off!"

Jonathan laughed at the display. "Hah, courteous as ever, Sarah. Not surprised they pulled you in for this too. Long time no see, huh? So tell me, are these stories of 'The Bat Outta Hell' pilot anywhere near the truth?"

"Oi, I try to be modest about that. It's not that hard to give Brutes the slip if you what you're doing." Sarah remarked.

"Whatever you sayâ€|" Jonathan shrugged. "So I guess you've met the Elite already?"

"If you can call exchanging names and shaking his hand meeting him. The bugger hasn't said a word since." Sarah muttered, rolling her eyes. "Maybe you'll have better luck."

Jonathan approached the Elite, who had shifted from his position by a large supply crate. An already intimidating figure was made even more imposing by the full suit of Ranger armor, sans helmet and it's reflective visor. Gold-hued reptilian eyes held Jonathan in an analytical gaze as both of them silently shook hands. Ultimately, it was the low baritone rumble of the Sangheili's voice that broke the silence.

"Harka 'Vadam, present at the request of the diplomatic council. It would seem as though even a scoutship needs someone manning the guns."

"Jonathan Graves, in charge of anything and everything slipspace." He smirked slightly as he couldn't help but brag: "I aided in designing the engine, you know."

"Very well. In the case that anything goes wrong with the slipspace

drive, I expect you'll be fixing it?" Harka asked rhetorically.

His ego smarting at the Sangheili's retort, Jonathan tried steering the conversation in a different direction: "So, umâ€| Vadam wouldn't exactly be a common name, among the Sangheili would it?"

"There has only ever been one 'Vadam bloodline. If you mean to ask if I am related to the Arbiter Thel 'Vadam, ask directly. I've no patience for those who hide behind implied statements and turns of phrase." Harka's mandibles twisted into a Sangheili equivalent of a scowl. "You will find that I am quite different from my esteemed Uncle."

"You're rather blunt for someone who's suppose to be a diplomat." Jonathan shot back, annoyed that all he'd done was stumble right into what seemed to be a sore point for the Elite. "Perhaps there's another reason why the diplomatic council ordered you onto a scoutship?"

"Enough of this. We are due to depart soon." And with that, Harka stomped onto the ship, jamming his helmet over his head as he went. Its mirrored visor did little to mask the anger radiating from the large alien as he stomped aboard the ship.

"Well, that was a downright piece o' piss." Sarah snapped. "Since when did you become such an ass?"

"Ever since the gods of social interaction decided they had a grudge against me. I hate my life sometimes." Jonathan moaned as they walked up the ramp

"Oh well that's just bloody wonderful. I'm stuck in a tin can with a pissed off alien, a socially inept slipspace engineerâ€| Gah, I sure hope you don't make an enemy out of the ship's AI."

"Wait, we have an AI on board? Gah!" Jonathan jumped as a fox, wreathed in holographic flames, flashed into existence right in front of him.

"Surprise! Epsilon-class AI unit Waypointer at your service."

"Grrâ€| This just keeps getting better and better." Jonathan muttered. "Aren't you suppose to be in a holotank or something?"

Waypointer started swimming through the air around Jonathan's head cheekily, turning himself over and addressing Jonathan upside down: "Holotanks? Who needs 'em when you've projection rails? These ships have nothing but the latest and greatest!"

Sure enough, a small point of light on from a narrow stripe on the ceiling indicated the source of the projection.

Righting himself, Waypointer continued: "Anyway, now that you know about me, we should really get moving. I've run all the pre-flight checks that I can, but there are a few left that have a manual component."

"I'll take care of it." Sarah volunteered. Turning to Jonathan, she

shook her head. "As for you, justâ€| Ugh, I 'ave no words for you; just don't let your gaping cakehole get yourself killed."

### 3. Chapter 2: Making an Entrance

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><p>[Training scenario initiated. Artificial gravity disengaged.] A computerized voice echoed across the practice arena aboard the necessity, accompanied by a slightly disorienting sensation of weightlessness.</p>

I steeled myself as I tightened my grip on the railing I was hanging onto, looking across the arena at my opponent. He was a real brute if I ever saw one, but the brief flash of alarm as the gravity switched off told me he wasn't too experienced in zero-G combat.

[Round begins in 5, 4, 3â€|] The computer began counting down, as I gathered my legs beneath me.

[â€|2, 1. Round begin!] I exploded off the wall, throwing my full weight into a lightning fast tackle that smashed my foe into the wall. Taking advantage of his resulting disorientation, I smacked his head into a vent grate, and spun away, flipping over and grasping the exposed pipes of the ceiling between my legs. I began a furious inverted assault, taking advantage of my unconventional angle to circumvent his blocks and jabs, landing at least two more hits on him before he slipped past my own guard, and got in a vicious right hook that swatted me into the wall. Thankfully, being somewhat smaller than him meant I was just that much faster: flipping back to the floor, I slammed both feet into his chest as I went. Preparing for the knockout, I readied another flying tackleâ€|

Only for an alarm to start blaring as the gravity snapped back on, dumping me to the floor.

The captain's voice rang out over the ship's comms: "Alert! A Covenant-type slipspace rupture detected. Units C-418, I-343, and L-337 are to report to pod bay 19."

I spared a backwards glance at the trooper I'd just thrashed before running off: poor guy landed on his head when the gravity came back and needed help from the medical crew. Wasting no more time, I rushed to the armory and suited up in the latest and greatest available to the Freelancing wing: Semi-powered drop armor. Not too dissimilar to an ODST BDU, but upgraded piezoelectric fibers let it carry its own weight, allowing for denser composites in the plates, and increased stability in firing weapons, even the high-caliber rounds needed for plasma-jacketing systems like the M6-P to work right. Stepping into my boarding pod, I secured my guns and checked the charge on my pulse-slicer. Everything seemed good to go.

The coms crackled to life as the captain radioed in to the squad: "Alright people, here's what we're dealing with: The part of this ship's design and slipspace signature suggests a covenant vessel, but on the whole, it's not something we've seen before. Proceed with caution: it hasn't responded to any of our communications, so we're

assuming hostile intent."

As my pod rotated into launch position, I caught my first actual look at the vessel. No wonder the captain wasn't so sure of what to do. I-343, my friend Jessica, radioed in with her thoughts: "What the hell? It looks like the Covenant designed a super-sized pelican, then gave the blueprints to a UNSC shipyard to build." Sure enough, smooth lines dulled the edges of a traditional, utilitarian UNSC design, and silvery alloys accented the olive-drab colors of the vessel. It passed out of sight as the boarding pod reached deployment position: I braced for launch.

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><p>Jonathan Graves was not in a good mood: partly due to the nausea-inducing lurch of getting forcibly dropped out of slipspace, and partly because he actually understood exactly why getting sucked out of slipspace by a gravity well was bad for the ship. And oh, yeah: the seemingly hostile cruiser that was opening what seemed to be a missile launch bay at them. To think that the nine tedious days of their journey would amount to something like this...<p>

He stated lividly at the holographic fox who had curled up on the instrument panel, feigning sleep. "Don't give me that bullshit, Waypointer! You were supposed to plot a safe route for us, and what do you do? Not only did you drop us in a gravity well, overloading half our systems including the comms, with the energy feedback, you put us in the crosshairs of a hostile ship with no way of explaining ourselves!"

The fox raised his head slightly and opened one eye lazily. In a hurt tone, he remarked: "You say that like I planned it. I only plotted a vector that had the least chance of intersecting with those of other scoutships. And don't say that I could have 'seen' the position of the star and calculated a better exit: you of all people should know how much gravitational lensing can mess that strategy up."

A small hand radio came to life as Harka called in from a maintenance room: "Although I was successful in re-routing power to one of the plasma torpedo arrays, the magnetic fields still require a complete recalibration. Unfortunately, I do not think we have the fifteen minutes that such a process would take."

Upon hearing the news, Sarah abruptly whipped out a bottle of Jack: "Well, mates, it's been a good run, but it looks like this is it. Cheers!" And with that, she tipped the bottle back and started drinking.

"Missiles launched, fifteen seconds to impact." Waypointer pointed out. "Geeze, they're the size of SOEIV's! Ten seconds left..."

"Oi, stop couting down, ya little runt! We know what time it is, and stuffâ€!" Sarah slurred out.

"Ok, fine. You know, those missiles are the size SOEIV's, and now that they're closer, they \_look\_ a whole lot like SOEIV's tooâ€! Five seconds left."

Sarah swatted at Waypointer's hologram. "I bloody told ya, stop counting!"

"I think they're SOEIV's."

With an almighty crash, the remarkably SOEIV-like missiles slammed into the ship. And failed to explode.

Jonathan looked around in confusion: there weren't any flames consuming the bridge, no sensation of being turned into human-jerky by the vacuum of space. Addressing Waypointer, he remarked: "You know, as much as you're a little digitized prick, I get the feeling those were SOEIV's."

The resulting moment of awkward, tense silence was broken by several loud thunks, followed by an ear-splitting grating that seemed to reverberate through the whole ship.

Harka's radio crackled to life with another burst of static: "It appears these "missiles" have been modified to make an airtight seal at the point of impact. I see no purpose for such a feature unless their payload is quite different from what we expected. I can only conclude that boarding is highly likely."

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><p><strong>AN\*\*: Hope I haven't lost you guys yet. If I need to adjust anything, just drop a review. Right now I'm just flying mostly blind, and it doesn't feel too good.

#### 4. Chapter 3: Fright Night

\*\*Chapter 3:\*\* Fright Night

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><p>Putting away the pulse-slicer, I picked up my Hurricane carbine and dropped down into the strange, covenant-pelican vessel. Jessica lowered herself in shortly after, radioing in to our comrade, who was nowhere to be seen.<p>

"Unit L-337, report in. What part of the ship did you penetrate?"

"Uh, judging by the shelves full of cans and packaged food, I managed to find the kitchen."

"Well keep your mind on the mission, not your stomach, ya hear?" Jessica reminded him.

I rolled my eyes: Greg, or L-337 as he was known on the team roster, was the type to load up on heavy weapons, duck behind cover, then eat two ration bars. Too bad for him that he probably couldn't eat whatever Covenant food was on boardâ€¦ Greg's voice coming over the comms interrupted my train of thought.

"Oh, and guys, listen to this: the labels on this stuff? It's all in English. It doesn't make any sense, I know, but that's how it is."

A frown crossed Jessica's features as she began overriding a door terminal: "This get's weirder and weirderâ€¦ You think maybe the rest

of humanity joined up with the covenant somehow?"

"Heck if I know. At least someone still knows how to make a mean breakfast burrito." Greg radioed back.

"Gregory Dylan Smith, what did I just tell you!"

"Sorry, it was just left in the microwave! Sitting there and smelling amazing, you know how it is!"

I sighed: typical Greg. "Give it a rest for once, Jess." I said. "Greg, you can afford to stay put for a few minutes: we're opening the doors you need to get to us. This whole ship has been locked down. Stay alert."

"Alright then, I'll just..." Greg's reply cut off to static.

Well isn't that just great. "Greg? Greg?" I called. Still no answer. Dammit, what hell was going on? Suddenly, Jessica leapt away from the door terminal, raising her dual pistols and pointing them around the room.

"Woah, woah, 'the heck are you doing?!" I asked.

Slowly lowering the pistols, she explained: "Gah, that was scary! my whole motion tracker was swarming with hostiles somehow."

"Probably just a glitch. Come on, let's get these doors open and get to Greg."

And that was when the power cut out. This just keeps getting better and better! But then, an alert from my own tracker nearly made me jump straight out of my fur: A hostile had appeared, right behind me. Turning around and taking a wild swing in the dark, I found nothing there: my motion tracker was blank. No Red dots, but no green dot from Jessica, no green dot from Greg. Shit.

A flicker of white in my peripheral vision caught my attention: still nothing on the motion tracker. I turned around; only to have my heart try and leap out of my chest as piercing static filled my comm channel. Before me, a ghostly apparition faded from view. Normally I would have passed it off as a hologram, but with no visible projectors around, I couldn't help but feel a superstitious chill run down my spine.

The lights flickered again: somehow, the clean, alloy plated corridor I had been in was replaced with a rusted, grimy hallway: blood splattered on the wall formed a grim message: "Shoot for their limbs!" it read. Pondering the writing, it felt as though I was watching in slow-motion as my body reacted all on its own to the corpse below the message, which had jumped to life, raising a bloody, torn hand in my direction. My Hurricane carbine kicked back in my hands, once, twice, three time as my finger started working the trigger. The twisting, electric blue contrails that gave the carbine its name extended behind the trio of plasma-jacketed bullets: the first two went wide while the third found it's mark in the zombie's torso. Then I was on the floor, gasping for breath as some unseen force slammed into my gut.

Before I could react, I found my hands being dragged behind my back and secured with some kind of cuffs. As I was dragged to my feet, several deformed bullets fell away from where they had failed to penetrate my armor and bullet-resistant undersuit. Looking around, I noticed several things: the corridors were back to their impeccably clean status, I was being held by an Elite, and Jessica was being dragged alongside me, her chestplate scorched and dented. Well, crap. I sure hoped Greg was doing better!

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><p>Waypointer let a smug grin spread across his muzzle as he observed his handiwork. "And that," he announced, "Is how you defend a ship without firing a single shot! Hoo boy, I love these holographic projection rails!</p>

"Yeah, ok, great." Jonathan said. "Now let's hope we can get some information out of these guys!" Whoever, or whatever the hell they are. Those camera feeds sure didn't make them look human." The invaders' digitigrade legs, elongated helmets, and tails made that point pretty clear. Jonathan continued: "Did you pick up any of their comm chatter to work out a translation routine?"

"Yeah, I stated getting their comm chatter about a minute after Sarah passed out." Waypointer said, waving a holographic paw at the slumped form their pilot, who'd been knocked out cold by the whiskey she'd gulped down. Continuing, Waypointer remarked: "And it was pretty obvious that I didn't need a translation program: they were talking in standard UNSC English. It doesn't make any sense, I know, but that's how it is."

The doors swished open as Harka unceremoniously dumped the two aliens into a pair of empty seats. "The bridge is a rather unconventional place for an interrogation, but I suppose it will do, as long as the prisoners are secured properly." The elite remarked, adjusting the cuffs to keep the captives in their seats.

Sarah stirred at the word "interrogation". Blinking the sleep out of her eyes, she struggled to focus them on the two captured troopers. It was pretty clear when their presence registered on her booze-soaked brain: "Ohhh, so YOU'RE the pricks with all rockets-no-brains who think they can take on the UNSC! Well take it from me, we're gonna do a number on you, ya' one-eyed bomb lobbin' cactus eatin' pot-bellied bloody fat jigglin' whoppin' big backstabbin' lard-armed creepy spastic little bloody blind-eyed rotten little twitchy pickle-headed rocket-hoppin' potato-pottin' pony-mutant two-faced bastards!" She ranted as she stumbled forward and ripped off one of their helmets, only to stumble right back in shock: "Holy dooley!" A furry, canine face stared back at her, looking decidedly unamused by Sarah's verbal diarrhea.

"Bomb-lobbing, pot-bellied, mutant pony two-face bastards?" It growled, showing its sharp teeth as it spoke. "Depending on who you ask, that isn't even the half if it, girl."

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><p><strong>AN: \*\*Just a small thank you to all the people reading, and a somewhat bigger thank you to those who have reviewed. If you've

been reading this, and have something to say, say it! (compliments welcome, constructive criticism appreciated, flames tolerated.) Also, here is a scale comparison of the Hurricane Carbine and the M6P, put alongside a BR:

<http://img541.imageshack.us/img541/6864/fanficgunshuman.png>

Just substitute in the appropriate punctuation!

## 5. Chapter 4: Explanations

Well guys, I'm back! Read, review, and enjoy!

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><p>Before anyone could get their jaw off the floor or bring their mandibles back together, a comm transmissions crackled in from the helmet rolling on floor: "Unit C-418, there were some irregularities in your vitals a few minutes ago. Give us a status report: what the hell is going on in there? Unit C-418, please respond!"</p>

"Could someone get that?" Asked the canine's comrade. "I don't think any of us want to get blown to tiny little space chunks once command realizes something fishy is going on."

Picking the helmet up off the floor, Jonathan started looking for the radio controls, and was about to try and put it over his own head when the canine spoke up again: "It think it would be best if I did the talking. Although you'd probably be a little more diplomatic than your inebriated comrade, command might not react too good if a stranger started talking over my radio."

Considering the prisoner's input, Jonathan wordlessly plonked the helmet back on the captive's head, holding down the transmission button for him.

"Command, this is unit C-418. I've got some good news, and some bad news. The good news is that whoever these people are, they don't seem to be immediately intent on harming us. The bad news, however, is that we did get captured. However, given the fact that we were taken to the bridge instead of the brig, and the fact that they claim to be UNSC personnel, I don't think they're entirely hostile. Just give us some time."

The canine, or C-418 as "command" called him, turned to his captors, and relayed the reply: "We have ten minutes before they send a group of pelicans to tow us into the docking bay. We answer your questions, you answer ours, deal?"

Harka raised his plasma repeater slightly: "Something tells me you are hardly in any position to make any kind of 'deal', Bestial One."

"And you're sitting helpless in front of a heavily armed frigate. Something tells me you're not in a position to be making demands either, squid-face."

"And now that we're all done insulting each other, can we please get a move on with the explanations?" Waypointer interrupted, his hologram flashing up between the two. "You, doggybreath, give us your

side of the story first."

"Alright then. Surely you've all heard of the Battle of Psi Serpentis? Two covvie fleets vaporized when Admiral Preston J. Cole made a gas giant go supernova?"

"We are aware of such an event." Harka confirmed. "It is a pity that he had to sacrifice himself in such a way: Humanity could use more noble commanders such as him."

"Well, he didn't sacrifice himself: he pulled off an in-atmosphere slipspace jump before the detonation and caught up with the Insurrectionist fleet and a group of UNSC refugee ships that they had helped evacuate earlier. Synching up their navigation data, the entire group hightailed it out into unknown space."

"So how do you explain the ears and tail then?" Jonathan asked.

"Well, that's a bit more complicated. By some random chance, or luck, call it what you will, fragments of a long-lost gene started to reassemble within the evacuated population, almost like a file transmitted through a Torrent system. In just a few generations, scientists had enough fragments to reconstruct the gene in its entirety. What they found was stunning: the protein complex it coded for could take a non-human genome and integrate it with our own DNA seamlessly. When word got out, some scoffed at it, saying it was just some pseudo-science lampshading all those werewolf legends of the centuries past. Others, however, saw an opportunity: they were fed up with the UNSC's history of oppressive overreach, and the anarchic extremism of the Insurrectionists. Instead of continuing the same arguments, they turned away from their sordid legacies and decided to use this new gene to forge themselves into something entirely different, and start with a completely blank slate."

Waypointer spoke up, tilting his head as he sifted through the information: "Soâ€¦ Maybe I'm overclocking my processors a bit much and jumping to conclusions here, but I'm guessing that this new gene wasn't pseudo-science and these people you're talking about hybridized their genes with animal DNA as their 'new start', right? What doesn't add up here though, is the time. It would take time for this gene to emerge, time for the research being doneâ€¦ If you really did originate from the ships leaving Psi Serpentis, it would have taken you all of nine years to get here, let alone set up a colony and all that. What gives?"

"Hey, even we're not sure how the timing works out: there are some fluctuations in slipspace, but until the super-jump the fleets did to get here, those fluctuations only distorted the space aspect, not time. But other than that, you've hit the nail on the head, foxy." This time, the canine's comrade spoke up from beneath her helmet. "Course, the impact of the newly transformed part of the population wound up opening a whole other can of worms, but that's a story for another time. What have we been missing while we set up shop out here in the boondocks of space?"

Although Jonathan was about to speak, Harka managed to start explaining first: "The turning point of the war was during the Battle of Installation 04, as the humans call it. At the time, Installation 04 was seen as a holy relic by the Covenant, and it's destruction due

to the actions of Spartan 117 ignited events that led to the Sangheili breaking away from the Covenant and allying with Humanity. After a series of other battles led to the death of the Covenant's remaining Prophets, and the remaining resistance quickly fell apart, save for some splinter groups that insist on continuing empty bloodshed."

"And now that most of the fighting is over, UNSC command has decided to begin rebuilding, reclaiming, and exploring. Guess which job we got." Jonathan finished.

A series of clunks echoed throughout the ship as several towing cables latched on to the scoutship. Sure enough, several pelican's could be seen outside, slowly dragging the ship towards the gaping hangar on the frigate.

"Well, folks, look's like time's up." Said the canine. "Can you untie us now? It'd help you make a better first impression if an extraction team didn't have to get us out of here."

Harka nodded silently as he released the two.

With her hands free, the second hybrid trooper took off her helmet, revealing a dust grey feline with ice blue eyes. "Well, now that we're all on somewhat friendlier terms, I think some introductions are in order." She said, "Jessica, rocketmen corps designation I-343."

"Russet, rocketmen corps designation C-418."

Nodding, Jonathan responded: "Jonathan Graves, slipspace engineer. Sarah over there is our pilot, but she's in no condition to talk, still." He finished, pointing out the inebriated woman slumped in her seat.

"Harka 'Vadam, weapons officer and Sangheili diplomat."

Waypointer's hologram manifested again, a burst of fire shaping into his fox avatar. "Wait a minute! I detect three hull breaches, not two." he pointed out. "I take it your comrade is elsewhere on board?" he asked, addressing the two hybrid troopers.

"Yes, that would be Greg, or L-337. He got stuck in the kitchen. Excuse me for a sec." Jessica said as she put her helmet back on to use the comms: "Greg! Where the hell have you been this whole time?!"

"Oh, whaa?! I heard the messages going back and forth from command, figured I could wait the situation out."

"And you didn't even try to make your way to us?"

"Hey, I'm no good at hacking: once I got locked out of the terminal I tried bashing the door in, but that didn't work so well either. My shoulder feels like it's turned to paste, what the hell is this thing made of?"

Everyone on the bridge turned to Waypointer as he started shaking and flickering with suppressed laughter that still managed to echo from the speakers. "What now, Construct?" Harka inquired.

"Bwahahahaâ€| Heh hehâ€| Oh boy, he fell for the holograms too, that's just priceless! He's been pounding on a foot-thick armored bulkhead for goodness knows how long. No wonder he's a little sore!" Waypointer remarked. Noting the hostile gazes being directed at him, he sent his hologram scampering down the corridor: "Alright, alright, I'll let him out now."

"Be quick about it. We're about to touch down in the Necessity's hangar." Russet called out. Rolling his eyes, he muttered under his breath: "Yeesh, what a catch: a drunk pilot, a prankster AI, a science-guy, and an Elite. To think that I nearly slept in todayâ€|"

## 6. Chapter 5: Storytime

A/N: It's been a while, but I'm back with my longest chapter yet! As always, read, review, and enjoy!

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Chapter 5: Storytime<strong>

\* \* \*

><p>I stood behind the scoutship crew as they repeated their story to the Captain: it had the same general gist as the Elite's terse summary of events, even if some of the details were rather unbelievable: humanity's finest Spartan working alongside a shamed Elite warrior who now led their entire race? Could have come straight out of a B-movie screenplay, as far as I was concerned. But either way, the captain was taking stock of the events quietly, giving little reaction in the meantime.<p>

"And that's why we're here. With the fighting over, HIGHCOM is sending out scoutships run by both civilians like us, and by military personnel to start the process of humanity branching out again. Harka here is accompanying us to help build cooperation between Humans and Sangheili. More of a grassroots approach instead of conventional politicking." Finished Jonathan, their physicist-slash-slipspace engineer.

"I see. And I'd assume you'd all like to get your ship fixed and go running off to tell everybody about your amazing find, hmm?" Responded the Captain.

"More or less. Things to do, people to see. I mean, technically we do have a quota to fill andâ€|" Jonathan stopped short as his colleagues both turned to look at him.

The Captain smiled thinly: "Really? Then why set such a random course? Surely some known locations would have been suitable for colonization. Please, explain."

"If we do have such a quota, I was never informed of it." The Elite, Harka interjected.

I smirked a little under my helmet as Jonathan withered under the hostile gazes of his crewmates and captain. Flustered, he snapped:

"Ok, fine. There isn't a quota. But quota or not, it's still best if we could get out of here as soon as possible. Technically, this planet would be considered a colony to reclaim, but really we should be spending more time gathering data on completely new worlds."

"Please excuse my co-worker here, we're all a little high-strung after what still feels like a near-death experience" The pilot, Sarah, spoke up.

"Be that as it may, I'm afraid I cannot let you leave, even after repairs to your ship. A message has just come in from our own government leaders, and given the present situation with ONI remnants and other such groups, we cannot entrust our location to the UNSC. I'm sorry." The captain looked over the mix of hostile and perplexed stares directed at him. Even I was a little confused, but since when did our own bureaucrats make decisions that made sense?

The Captain continued: "It is nothing personal, merely a security measure. You three have done nothing wrong, and as a gesture of our goodwill, you are free to roam around all planet side civilian zones."

"Uh, Sir?" Jessica spoke up, her tail swishing nervously, "Wouldn't that be an evenâ€|"

"Free to roam under escort." The Captain interrupted. "Russet, Jessica, Gregory: I am modifying your upcoming leave period, and you will be responsible for that escort."

There was a brief pause as the three of us exchanged glances. But in the end, our response was the same. "Yes Sir!"

"Very well. You are all dismissed." The Captain finished.

\* \* \*

><p>"Soâ€| An AI, huh?" I asked, trying to break the awkward silence that had filled the bay of the pelican as it descended towards the Everest docking bays.<p>

"Top of the line, coded and compiled specifically for this mission." Jonathan responded tersely, readjusting the memory unit in his lap before deciding on moving it to his backpack.

"I seeâ€|" Well that sure worked out great. Against my better judgment, I decided it was time for round two.

"What, no questions for us? Aren't you guys supposed to be collecting information on the places you visit?"

Again, Jonathan spoke up before his crewmates, his blunt tone cutting off whatever they were going to say. "Mostly geological, ecological, and metrological data. Besides, I thought prisoners weren't supposed to ask questions."

"You're not our prisoners, who said anything about that?"

"We aren't allowed to leave the system. You're here guarding us. We're prisoners in all respects but name."

"Ok, first you lie to us, then you blow things way out of proportion." Jessica shot back. "We didn't want this assignment either. No, instead of having a perfectly normal leave, relaxing at home, we have to babysit gourches like you."

"More like grouch, singular." Sarah spoke up. "Johnny-boy over here's been a downright arse this whole trip, to be honest."

"Hey, you're not exactly saying much either. What gives?" I remarked.

"Well, I don't know what do say, really. I still can't believe you were really human once." Sarah asked.

"Well, I was. Here, have a look." I reached into a pocket on my cargo pants (I'd changed into civilian clothes at this point) and took a photo of my old self out of my wallet. "That was taken on my 18th birthday, just a week or two before my transformation."

"Hmm, what a shame that you switched. You quite the handsome devil back then!" Sarah remarked.

"What? Are you saying I'm not a handsome devil anymore?" I grinned as she handed back the photo. Oh great. Another awkward silence, but this time it was more my fault than anyone else's. Jessica took it upon herself to break it, but at my expense: "Yeah Russet, you just look like a devil, forget handsome. Don't go flattering yourself too much."

"Heh, nah, you're alright. Just not my style." Sarah said diplomatically. "I guess your friends have similar photos?"

"Actually we don't." Greg replied from where he'd been sitting silently. "We're second-generation hybrids; it's our parents who made the switch."

"Oh, you can talk?" Sara blurted, before turning brick red in embarrassment at her ill-phrased comment.

"Ha, did you think I was just dumb muscle or something?" Greg remarked, chuckling.

A tiger/canine-based hybrid standing at an impressive 7'3" with a physique that could put a Spartan to shame, it was no wonder quite a few people underestimated Greg's intellect.

He grinned, and continued. "Don't worry about it: I get that a lot. As for the transformation, I think Russet over here should be the one to tell about it.

"Oh boy, here we go again. Man, that was a long dayâ€!" I muttered, ready to launch another retelling of what we came to call the "Escape from District 17"

\* \* \*

><p>The acrid scent of a burning vehicle hit me as I stepped out of the clinic's side entrance. Gunfire still cracked through the air,

and the sound of breaking glass told me that the chaos wasn't about to end any time soon. Nervously, I clutched the pistol that the Doc had handed out from whatever emergency supplies he had stored in back: I'd played my fair share of video games, but the weapon felt worryingly unfamiliar in my hands.<p>

Greg and Jessica followed behind as I peeked around a corner, taking stock of the situation: storefronts were ransacked, cars were totaled, and wreckage was pulled together into crude barricades.

I hastily yanked my head back as a commandeered police 'Hog careened down the street, its occupants spraying bullets recklessly.

From what I could see, our luck put us behind one of the barricades, making for an easy get away. Or at least, what would have been an easy getaway if a black-clad Supremacist hooligan hadn't picked that moment to turn the corner. His ghostly-white hockey mask might have hid his face, but didn't hide his sadistic excitement as he called out to his comrades: "Hey guys! We've got a deviant and a couple of furfaâ€|"

The goon was abruptly cut off as Greg pushed past me, swinging his riot shield around and bashing the masked man into the wall. The poor guy left a clean streak on the grimy surface as he slid down to the floor.

"Come on, we don't have much time." Greg muttered. "I don't think I shut him up fast enoughâ€|"

I was at a loss: either that warthog packed with trigger happy bigots would come driving by again, or whoever was with this guy would show up ready for a fight. And here we were, stuck in an alleyway with a fence at one end, a barricaded street on the other, and nothing but dumpsters and fire-escapes lining the walls.

Wait a minuteâ€|

"Guys, think 3D. Greg, push that dumpster over here. We can reach fire-exits and head up to the roofs."

"Hey, I might be the biggest of all of you, but I'll need some help. These things are huge!"

Jessica rolled her eyes. "Bro, do you even lift?" She remarked sarcastically as we all got into position.

"As a matter of fact, I do lift." Greg shot back. "Now 3, 2, 1â€| Push!"

Leaning into the cold metal of the dumpster, I couldn't help but notice the muscles that shifted and bunched together under the orange and black striped fur on Greg's arms as he strained against the bulk of the dumpster. I wondered if my own impending changes would bring a similar strengthâ€| How long had it been since the Doc had said I had fifteen minutes until the change?

But there was no time to worry about that: the Hog's roaring engine could be heard again as it circled the block. Ignoring Jessica's tail hanging down in my face as I climbed, I finally pulled myself up to the roof. Jessica was already there, standing stock-still, her tail

swaying nervously: only her feline ears gave the occasional twitch at the gunfire from below. And from the supremacist sniper camped out on the roof hardly more than 10 feet away from us, lost in the world of his scope.

Another gunshot cracked out: "That's it. Go straight to hell where you belong, filthy mongrel."

Shit. Stopping this crazed gunman would slow down our escape, and I sure didn't want to be on the run with an unfamiliar body. But leaving him be would mean that many more bodies counted in the death toll, and I certainly wasn't a selfish bastard.

Praying that my shoes wouldn't clank too loudly on the prefabricated metal roofing, I gingerly stepped closer. Jessica and Greg took cover behind the vent ducts criss-crossing the roof, just in case. I took another step forwards. I was close enough to make out details of his outfit. Like the goon lying passed out in the alley below, the sniper also hid his features behind a hockey mask, this one with a black stripe running top to bottom through the left eyehole. Below a bulletproof vest and some presumably scavenged pieces of riot armor was a remarkably plainclothes outfit: cargo pants, a sweatshirtâ€| He could have been anyone, really, but a black armband with white snowflake emblazoned on it made his affiliation with the supremacists clear.

Another gunshot masked a particularly heavy footfall: Lucky for me, but very, very unlucky for whoever was in this guy's sights. But then he lifted his face away from the scope, and I panicked, lashing out with an ill timed kick that only spun him onto his back. I didn't even get his gun away from him. For a split second, I was staring down the barrel of his modified DMR. And then I heard the click of the trigger being pulled on an empty chamber: the depleted clip dropped lamely out of the weapon thanks to an auto-release mechanism.

I hardly remembered what happened next: I was probably half crazy on some kind of adrenaline rush. I might have broken one of his legs with a single stomp, then kicked him in the neck and threw him off the edge. I might simply have grabbed his gun, bashed him head, and left him passed out on the rooftop. I might even have pulled out the pistol I had been given, forgotten until that last second, and shot the scumbag in the face. I really have no idea which one it was. Greg and Jessica's accounts weren't much help either, as they had gotten caught up ducking bullets from other snipers, and weren't keeping an eye on me.

Maybe all of those versions were true, several encounters blurring together: by the time I snapped out of the haze, we were already in the attic of some building several blocks away, formed by a more traditionally constructed wooden-framed roof erected over the ordinary, dull grey of the same prefab metal that was the norm of these early neighborhoods. I slumped down against one of the pillars, sliding to the floor. I was pretty sure I hadn't done much, physically, but the constant heart-pounding stress was surprisingly draining.

"So, you guys think we're safe here?" I asked. "I mean, we can still hear people shooting, but we've seen no one but the odd sniper or twoâ€| "

Greg just shrugged noncommittally, but Jessica spoke up from where she was peeking out through a crack in the cheap, ill-maintained wooden construction. "Hate to break it to you, but the set of barricades in the intersection outside tells me that this is not a safe area."

"Dammit! What do we do now?"

"Well, there is a subway entrance on one of the side streets." Jessica replied. "All they've done there is cordon off the entrance."

I walked over to find my own peep-hole, looking out over the Supremacists' setup: Sandbags, over turned trashcans, and even a piece of military grade deployable cover served as the defense, while SAW machine gun emplacements and MAB5 assault rifles supplied the fire power.

We were still close enough to hear gunfire, but this area seemed to be on the edge of the fighting: the SAWs sat unattended as the Supremacists below busied themselves painting their iconic snowflake icon in the middle of the intersection.

"Hmmâ€| Think we could make a run for it?" I asked.

"Well, the subway entrance is basically right across the street. But if they can get to the SAWs before we can get to coverâ€|"

I shuddered inwardly at the thought: a cousin of mine was an ER doctor, and had left some case photos open on his computer once. One of the pictures was of a SAW victim, a Supremacist who had had his weapon turned on him in one of the first full-scale battles that had grown out of the riots they started. I couldn't bring myself to look at raw hamburger for the next two weeks.

I shook my head to clear it, but instantly regretted the action: I nearly passed out as the room started spinning around me. Damn; I'd read articles on the hybridization factor, and one of the first signs that the major changes were about to begin was diminished sense of balance. The initial stage was when the hybridization factor started splicing the genes of interest into the body's cells. After that some intracellular changes begin, like increased mitochondrial division, gearing up numerous metabolic pathways in preparation for the third and final stage, where the bulk of the animal genes spliced in by the hybridization factor activated, resulting in a flood of intercellular signaling that would trigger the physical changed. Between the second and third stages, the neural pathways of the mind had adjusted just enough to be using a mental map of the hybrid body, but before any external changes took place. The resulting disconnect is what causes the dizziness.

As the room stopped spinning like a merry-go-round, I stared making my way down the stairs to street level. I paused as I noticed Greg and Jessica looking at me, concerned.

"Uhâ€| You ok there, man?" Greg asked.

"Uh, yeah. Why wouldn't I be?" I said, trying to shrug off my uneasiness.

"Well, you went cross-eyed, for starters." Jessica remarked as we walked down. "Then you stumbled halfway around the room leaned over at forty five degrees. It's a miracle you didn't fall flat on your face!"

"You think maybe we could wait untilâ€¦ you knowâ€¦" Greg trailed off, obliquely referring to my coming transformation.

"Nah. It's close, but even I don't know if we have that much time."

Reaching the ground floor, I peeked out the building's doorway to see if the situation had changed: the only SAW emplacement with line of sight on our path to the subway still sat unattended.

So we ran. By the time the supremacists, still milling about painting their logo on the street, noticed us, we were halfway to the subway entrance. By the time someone actually got to the gun, we were already leaping down the stairs two at a time, and the short burst of bullets that tore into the wall behind us came across as the punchline to a lame joke than anything actually threatening.

But it turned out that the joke was on me: as I reached the bottom of the stairs, I collapsed. Despite the painkiller I took back the clinic, it felt as though I'd been lit on fire from the inside. Beneath the raw pain, I could feel a strange, surging activity in my bones as osteocytes started dissolving and re-depositing bone according to my newly revamped genome. I struggled out of my shoes as I felt the shifting move down my legs, my feet morphing to a digitigrade position as joints shifted into their new positions.

It was weird feeling: I was in pain, a constant stream of coming from between my clenched teeth attested to that, but at the same time it didn't blind me to what was happening. The burning of that gene-fueled internal fire spread outwards, through my muscles and down my limbs, where sets of claws push out from my fingertips and newly formed paws. I squeezed my eyes shut at another surge of pain: when I opened them again, I could see a covering of rust-red fur had grown in. I noticed a pressure building at the base of my spine: I looked behind myself to find a bushy tail, Then, in a final push, I nearly blacked out as my face began to warp, pushing outwards into a canine muzzle, my ears becoming pointed and wolf-like.

I started to struggle to my feet as the pain faded. Both Greg and Jessica stepped in to lend a hand.

"Wow, look at you!" Jess remarked, smiling. "We need to find a mirror asap!"

Greg's vigorous pat on the back nearly sent me to the floor: "You're looking pretty good, man! Now let's get the hell out of here."

## 7. Chapter 6: Legacy

A/N: Sorry for the absence, I've been busy with stuff here and there. Just a quick update that was pulled together a few sentences at a time over this month, so if you see anything wrong with my style or flow here, please tell me in a review so that I can fix it!

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><p><strong>Chapter 6: Legacy<strong>

"And that's pretty much how it happened." I wrapped up. "The station was vacant and trains were passing right by, probably to keep people out of the hotzone, but one of them stopped for us eventually."

"So let me get this straight: you get caught up a huge street battle, do all this crazy stuff to get out of there, and you took the subway home?" Jonathan asked, his eyes narrowed skeptically.

"Well when you put it that way, it sounds dumb." I shot back.

"Well that's because itâ€|"

The pilot called out over the comms: "Shaddup back there! We're on final approach to the Bellerophon Docks, so get your crap together and be ready to get the hell off my pelican!"

I was about to shout a witty comeback, but a low baritone voice interrupted my train of thought: the Elite.

"What is the term humans use for that kind of person? I cannot quite recall the slang that so many useâ€|" He remarked in an oddly smooth baritone. I'd expected the alien's voice to be, I dunno, harsher, I guess?

"A term for that kind of person? Asshole seems about right." Jessica piped up, the grin on her face clashing with her harsh language.

"No, our equivalent of that would be "shizno", despite our version being at least four times as foul." The Elite responded, unfazed by Jessica's vulgar choice of words. "The original had something to do with bedsâ€|"

"Bow Chika Bow wow!" Greg called out, making me elbow him in the ribs.

"Ok, in all seriousness though," I remarked, shaking my head at the antics of my friends, "I think the phrase you're looking is "woke up on the wrong side of the bed", am I right?"

"Yes, thank you. Though I see no reason to adopt such turns of phrase in my own speech, I at least make an effort to understand them, however illogical they might be."

"Illogical? How so?"

"How would one's orientation upon awakening have any bearing on a person's mood or irritability?"

I had to admit, the alien had a pretty good point. Where did that phrase come from, anyway? There was a slight bump as the Pelican touched down, the whine of the vectored-thrust engines growing softer and giving way to the cacophony of the hangar: clangng footsteps of load-lifting exoskeletons, the thud of 'copter blades spinning through the air, and a constant hum of engines and voices alike.

The Elite spoke up as he undid his harness and picked up his bag.

"And speaking of irritability, I doubt we should irritate this pilot by staying on board any longer than we have to."

The rear bay opened up to reveal an oddly still scene: only a load-lifter, painted in industrial yellow, was moving crates around. Most of the noise was coming from behind a pile of containers that hid the landing area from view. I guess Command wanted to keep the presence of an Elite on the down low, I thought as I noticed how the alien's alabaster armor and mirrored EVA-style visor stood out from the dull gray, grease stained and rust-splotched deck plates.

"What kind of a scrapheap is this place anyway?" Jonathan remarked, casting a disdainful gaze around the hangar. "For a spaceport with a grandiose name like Bellerophon, I sure wasn't expecting it to look like a run-down ship hangar.

"That's because it is a ship hangar, dumbass!" Jessica retorted, rolling her eyes as we stepped into the elevator: "Jesus, someone sure is channeling Captain Obvious today!"

"Jess, give him a break." I reprimanded. "For future reference though, this place started life as a UNSC frigate called the Bellerophon. After dropping off the radar, it resurfaced with a few modifications the Insurrectionist ship the Bellicose. When we started colonizing, several craft were grounded and served as a center of operations for building up a city. The Bellicose and a few other ships landed first, serving as a spaceport and air hub. The whole complex inherited the Bellicose's original name of Bellerophon, and that's where we are right now."

The doors opened up to on the lower levels of the ship: an oily greasiness hanging in the air told me it was the vehicle bay. Taking a habitual sniff, I could pick out mechanical lubricants, fuel drippings, and cleaning fluids. Military issue too, although I wasn't that sure given the cacophony of chemicals my nose was picking up. Still, it wouldn't be too surprising: this close to the military wing of the spaceport, only a few civilian vehicles could be seen, most of them dwarfed by massive, jeep-like warthogs and even larger cargo transports. Most of them, except for the bright orange monster of a truck that Greg was proudly leaning against, keys in hand.

I tuned out as he began giving our guests his usual spiel on how he'd built the thing from the ground up. I knew how it went: He'd taken the frame of a scrapped Warthog, and started by lowering it closer to the road. Wanting to get both high speed and torque, he had put in a hybrid engine system, with a natural gas fueled generator powering each of the wheels' independent electric motors. Topping it off with walled flatbed in back along with a sloping windshield and roll-cage combination surrounding the passenger and driver, the end result was a formidable, seemingly paradoxical combination of sports vehicle and heavy-duty truck.

Two loud, near simultaneous shouts brought me back to reality:

"Shotgun!"

"Shotâ€¢! Dammit!"

For once in a very long time, Jessica had been beaten to the punch, and the seat of honor taken from her, by someone we had just met no less.

Piling into the truck, I took a seat on the narrow bench wedged in behind the front seats, with the pilot Sarah beside me, and Jessica in riding in the truck bed with the Elite.

Turning onto the highway, I couldn't help but grin at the stunned expressions of our guests. Even the Elite was looking around, though I couldn't make out any kind of expression beneath his angular visor.

Along the sides of the roads lay a multitude of grounded ships. Like seeds of some strange but wonderful plant, they had opened up and started to grow. Verdant hydroponics towers rose from their surface like new shoots, and the glittering glass of apartment windows had crystallized on others. Other roads branched off like roots, leading to more ships as well as newer buildings that had started to rise from scratch. But for all the promise that made me smile every time I set foot on the surface, one ship always dampened the mood. Even our visitors noticed the painful gash in the city's appearance of burgeoning opportunity.

"Woah, what the hell 'appened there?" Sarah inquired, pointing a finger at the source of her confusion: the Persistence.

"The Reclaimers happened." I growled, looking over at the burnt out husk of a ship, a crater-like hole through its midsection. "That wreck over there used to be a research vessel called the Persistence. Ground Zero for the discovery and refinement of the hybridization factor, and one of the few guaranteed safe-zones for hybrids once hate-groups started crawling out of the woodwork."

I sighed darkly as the wreckage receded into the distance. "3:00pm, September 2nd. A Magnetic Accelerator Cannon round comes barreling out of the sky and tears through the Persistence, wiping out a full third of the people inside. Then came the drop pods. Not drop pods occupied by noble ODST's, but drop pods filled with hatred incarnate: a new breed of Supremacist, hyped up on the rumble-drugs and spouting twisted religious dogma."

"Religious \_dog\_ma?" Jonathan spoke up, a smirk on his face. "That's a bit rich, coming from you."

"Hey, don't make me reach over there and \_bitch\_smack you. This was a screwed up, tragic 9/11 of a modern era. As the investigation sifted through the wreckage and countless bodies, the choking dust and chilling echoes, one thing was clear: we had an enemy in our midst. A group of ONI diehards still loyal to the UNSC had unified most of the supremacist groups under a religious banner, something to do with 'reclaiming our legacy' and 'fulfilling the will of our forefathers'. It's a load of crap, but a load of crap that can turn humans into monsters."

A brief silence ensued, the only sound coming from the wind whipping through the truck's open design. Then once again, the Elite spoke up,

surprising me by breaking his usual show of quiet stoicism.

"Canine, what did you say these warriors called themselves?"

"I have a name, you know. It's Russet. And these people were calling themselves Reclaimers, why do you ask?"

No answer: I was staring at a blank visor.

"Uh, anyone there?"

"I am sorry. But my own honor, as well as the chain of command, forbids me from saying any more."

End  
file.